WHAT CAN ONE TOMB TELL US ABOUT THE XIONGNU EMPIRE?



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Archaeologists in Mongolia have excavated the largest Xiongnu tomb yet found in the country. The Xiongnu were a powerful empire that controlled large parts of Central Asia between about 200 BC and AD 200. They did not build an empire in the same way as Rome or Han China, but they controlled people, animals and trade across a huge area. Inside the tomb, researchers found 413 objects, including a glass cup thought to have come from the Roman world, jade objects linked to Han China, a lacquered chariot and a silver horse decoration. These objects suggest that the Xiongnu were part of long-distance exchange networks stretching across Eurasia. The person buried there has not yet been identified. Scientists hope that DNA from teeth and hair may reveal more about their age, sex and origins.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

The discovery challenges the old idea that nomadic peoples were simply outsiders or raiders. The objects show that the Xiongnu took part in trade, diplomacy and cultural exchange across thousands of miles. Empires did not all work in the same way, and power could be built without large cities or written records.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

“What do the objects in this tomb show about ancient trade?”

Source: Smithsonian Magazine

https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/a-roman-cup-and-hundreds-other-treasures-unearthed-in-this-2000-year-old-tomb-reveal-the-rich-exchange-network-